

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Legend of Lovers-Plymouth, 12/26/51. Theatre Guild presents Kitty Black's adaptation of Jean Anouilh's London and Paris success. Starring Dorothy McGuire and Richard Burton, directed by Peter Ashmore...The Wild Duck-City Center, 12/26/51.. City Center, 12/26/51. New York City Theatre Company opens three play winter season with Ibsen revival, as adapted by Max Faber. Featuring Philip Loeb, David Lewis and Nan McFarland, directed by Morton DaCosta. Limited two week run. Reviewers may attend December 25th performance to avoid conflict.

Digests of Current Reviews - more on inside

Point of No Return-Alvin, 12/13/51. The professionals have returned to Broadway. That's how most of the daily critics felt about Leland Hayward's presentation of Paul Osborn's adaptation of John P. Marquand's novel. All but two reviewers praised all departments of show. In addition to top adjectives for perfect, effortless performance of Henry Fonda, Leora Dana in her first large role won raves. Supporting cast shared plaudits with H.C.Potter's direction and Jo Mielziner's simple sets in the involved production. Unusual aspect of "pro" votes was that many felt play actually lived up to huge advance publicity and box office build-up. Though Atkinson, Times, did find a few labored spots in the adaptation, he thought characters were better than those in the novel. Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Sheaffer, Eagle, objected to pat ending which allows hero to have his cake and eat it, too. Both recommended play, but suggested it would be much better if ending were more honest. Kerr, along with others, noted that second act flashbacks, were irrelevant. Dissenters included Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, and Shipley, New Leader. Former found characters uninteresting and their development unworthy of dramatic presentation. Latter termed proceedings well acted and well set, but obvious and superficial.

Nina-Royale, 12/5/51. Don't look for any disagreement among the weekly reviewers with unanimous panings filed by daily critics and by star Gloria Swanson. They all agreed that the only rewarding item in Samuel Taylor's adaptation of Russin's French comedy, as presented by Wilson and Tennent, was the fine comedy acting by Alan Webb. David Niven received an "A" for effort in a difficult situation. Swanson's acting was termed poor by most. Both George Jean Nathan and Newsweek appraiser thought adaptation lost original Gallic flavor of the sex farce. Newsweek man summed it up as froth gone flat, while Gabriel, Cue, settled for trite and tiresome. Gibbs, New Yorker, looked into the ethical matter of Swanson's pre-opening barrage, before he panned the play. If she didn't like the script, he explained, she should have turned it down. But once accepted, she was obliged to fellow actors and employers to keep quiet.

The Constant Wife-National, 12/8/51. Katharine Cornell's production of W. Somerset Maugham's Restoration comedy received mild praise of five weekly reviewers, while it was condemned by two. Grace George again won top laurels, with Brian Ahern and Cornell also being complimented for fine roles in slightly dated script. Many complimented the genius of Cornell and husband-director Guthrie McClintic in turning such a play into a commercial Broadway success. Gabriel, Cue, and Gibbs, New Yorker, panned production outright. Cue man just didn't think it worth doing, while New Yorker aisle sitter felt the "pro-woman" play was too dated. Time reviewer okayed production, but noted that several actors were very bad, with only George hitting proper Restoration urbanity.

' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr. Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph-WFDR | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader-WEVD |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. LI Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

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| <p> AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50 BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51 CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50 THE CONSTANT WIFE-12/8/51 THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51 GIGI-11/24/51 GLAD TIDINGS-10/11/51 GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50 I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51 THE KING AND I-3/29/51 LO AND BEHOLD-12/12/51 THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51 NINA-12/5/51 THE NUMBER-10/30/51 PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51 REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51 SAINT JOAN-10/4/51 SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49 STALAG 17-5/8/51 TOP BANANA-11/1/51 TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51 </p> | <p> Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32. None: 10-14-21-26. So-So: 31. Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-24-25-27-28. None: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-26-27-29-30-31-32-33. Con: 19-22-26-28. None: 10-14-21-23. So-So: 3. Con: 3. None: 11 through 22-25-26-28 through 33. Con: 6-15-16-24-27-30-33. None: 14-18-22-26-28-29-32. Con: 1-4-5-6-8-12-15-16-25-27-33. None: 14-22-23-26-28-31-32. Con: 1-2-4-5-6-7-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-29-30-33. None: 10-12-14-16-21-22-27-28-31-32. Con: 26. None: 10-21. Con: 3-5-7-12-27. None: 10-13-14-16-18-19-21-22-26-28-31 Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-24. -32 Con: 1-2-4-5-7-9-18-23-24-27. None: 11 thru 17-19-20-21-22-25-26-28 thru 33. Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26-32. Con: 1 thru 11-15-17-18-23-24-27. None: 12-13-14-16-19-20-21-22-25-26-28 thru 33. Con: 1-2-4-8-9-17-19-20-21-23-24-25. None: 10-11-12-16-22-26-27-28-31-32. Con: 2-6-7-15-20-23-24. None: 14-18-22-27-28-31-32. Con: 1-7-16-18-21-24-26-28-30-33. None: 12-13-17-22- Con: 2-4-6-15-23-24-32-33. None: 12-13-14-17-22-25. Con: 33. None: 5-9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28. So-So: 25. Con: 4-24-25-26-27-30. None: 10-21-22. Con: 6-7-27. None: 12-16-22-26-28-31-32. Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-27-28-32. </p> |
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' Morehouse on Critics '
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Reviewing fellow drama critics is probably the most hazardous of critical occupations, but Ward Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun, has set down his views on several of his colleagues in the current "Theatre Time." Here are some of his thoughts.

Of all the men and women earning a livelihood by writing of plays and players the Times' Brooks Atkinson has the greatest influence. His notice is the most eagerly read by those who follow the play reviews; while George Jean Nathan has the greatest prestige. Atkinson brings to his job his facility for expression, his hospitality toward the theatre and his innate good taste.

Richard Watts, Jr., Post, is a critic of fine standards, a man who writes gracefully and with great intelligence. His evaluations of a play are expert; he reacts whole-heartedly to a good performance and is seldom fooled by a bad one. But at times he seems to go in for an unnecessary deprecation of his own opinions. He has a sharp sense of the best in the theatre, a kindly and encouraging attitude toward experimentations. In addition, he is impressed by youth on the stage.

Time magazine's Louis Kronenberger, a distinguished critic and essayist, displays an acute and surprising theatrical perception for a man who is primarily interested in books and world literature. He is a master of cadence and measure Timestyle prose. He is given to vivid and unhackneyed writing. Kronenberger is quick to detect a weakness and usually gives a "why" to support his conclusion.

An alert and stage-wise reviewer, good and tough and expert in his appraisals, is how Morehouse sums up Gilbert W. Gabriel, Cue. A stylist and a phrase maker, he has lost none of his zest for play going. News' John Chapman is a cranky and cantankerous play reviewer, says the World Telegram & Sun drama columnist. He also has a tendency to over-praise a dramatic nonentity and vilify something that is really worth while. Ex-Journal American aisle man Robert Garland is characterized as a man with an almost fanatical love for the theatre. A discursive and provocative writer, he is a play judge who is seldom deceived by the merely pretentious. The World Telegram & Sun's own critic is termed the master of the "no opinion" by Morehouse. A gentlemen of charm and culture, Morehouse predicts there will be a great improvement in the personable Hawkins in decisiveness and in presentation of ideas, as he goes along.

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' Legit Stuff '
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Shows that closed include The Grand Tour...Call Me Madam and The Moon is Blue suspended for the week before Christmas...The Story Tellers, presented at the President by Clifford Kraus (no relation) closed after two performances of Ben Levinson's comedy drama which was panned by critics as too amateurish...Ewing Poteet, New Orleans Item, has disco jockey show on WJMR...Bill Callahan replaces drafted Bob Sheerer as leading dancer of Top Banana...Sammy Schwartz subbing for Sam Levene in Guys and Dolls...Ken Lesiter, Call Me Madam, dancer, killed in Elizabeth, NJ air crash...Otto Preminger will print his own program for Modern Primitive...Saint Joan moves to Century January 8th at popular prices...Columbia University honoring Rodgers & Hammerstein December 27th...Boston's Steuben's Cafe Midnight serves actors with proofs of reviews before the first editions, reports Billboard...Council of Living Theatre ran successful subscription campaign in Pittsburgh, now planning others...Porters, cleaners and matrons employed in Broadway theatres received a ten percent salary hike.

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' Green Room Department '
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CRITICS & DRINKS...Decision of London theatre managers to discontinue practice of entertaining critics and other members of the press on first nights deplored by "The Stage." Admitting that refreshments and an extra ticket are provided to make the writer's work more congenial, the trade paper states that only fools imagine managers serve drinks in the hope of getting good notices. It is hoped that the press agents will still be on duty between the acts in the press room to provide information.

COLUMN TIPS...Pressure groups want a NY theatre czar to watch after public morals, whispers Walker...John Mason Brown, SRL, the victim of a check forger, says Winchell...Police believe an unemployed actor robbed the Royale Box office, hints Kilgallen.

LEBLANG REVIVAL...As a grateful alumnus of Leblang's Cut Rate ticket agency, Sheaffer, Eagle, would like to see it revived. He believes that even today there are certain shows that would find the old policy economically feasible. But except for the \$3.00 top at the City Center he doesn't expect any quick move.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Patrons who saw Saint Joan at critics' urging are thanking them via theatre postcards, reveals Hawkins, WT&S...Katharine Cornell's husband should tell her she is too big to wear flowered patterns, complains WNBC Leon Pearson...Lee Shubert's autobiography will make a grand chronical of Broadway if he ever gets around to writing it, predicts Morehouse, WT&S.

PUN'S FUN...Latest crop of capsule dramatic criticisms from Hi Phillips, WT&S, include: Gigi-Life with Mommer...Point of No Return-A Tree Grows in Boston...The King and I-Call Me Gertie...The Constant Wife-Cornell 52, Maugham 7.

JAPANESE LEGIT...Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Green feels that American playwrights could learn much from their Japanese counterparts, he told Variety. Japan's has the best acting and the best produced plays he ever saw, with much of its material drawn from the myths and legends of medieval Nippon.

MAIL BAG...Two Times' readers disagree with Atkinson's mildly blaming Senator McCarthy for a decline in dramatic values. They first thought this stand illogical, because the only thing preventing American playwrights from turning out good plays is a lack of talent. The second sees the crusading Wisconsin Senator as a challenge to the American playwright.

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' Theatre News Round Up '
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Marta Linden subbed for Gloria Swanson in several performances of Nina...Preview Club Members of "Show of Month Club" attended Cleopatra productions at a preview matinee...Chicago critics panned Season in the Sun road company of Gibbs, New Yorker, play; accusing the NY critics of log-rolling, reports Variety...NY production of Harvard Hasty Pudding show may be picketed by various theatre unions...Murvyn Vye, recently in The Number, has filed a voluntary petition in bankruptcy in NYC...H.C. Potter quit as director of Point of No Return, Variety reports... Clarence Derwent joined touring company of A Sleep of Prisoners...Cleopatra openings were held at 7 20PM...The Grand Tour flop cost \$60,000... League of NY Theatres and Press Agents union wage dispute may be settled this week.

! Late Reviews !

Caesar and Cleopatra- Ziegfeld, 12/19/51. The Olivier's, in the Shaw half of their twin productions which opened for a limited 16 week NY run, lived up the tremendous advance press. Daily critics with one exception, cheered Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh for bringing style, glamor and grandeur back to the NY stage. All elements of the large production shared praise. This included Michael Ben-thall's direction, Roger Furse's turntable settings, Herbert Meneses' incidental music, and the perfect ensemble acting of the cast headed by Robert Helpmann and Wilfred Hyde White. Several newspaper critics voiced mild minor complaints, but only Dash, Women's wear, dissented. Main reason, he said, was because the entire company played down or lost entirely the original wit in the Shaw script. He also objected to Olivier's extreme underplaying as the aged Caesar. Kerr, Herald-Tribune, suggested that this may have been intentional on the star's part so he could play up his Antony role. Other critics voiced these same mild complaints. Though most billed the evening as a personal triumph for Leigh as the young Nile queen, Atkinson, Times, felt that Lilli Palmer did a nicer job in the role in the 1948 NY production. While Watts, Post, noted that Cedric Hardwicke was better than Olivier in this same production. But these were still all minor complaints. It was generally agreed that the season had reached its peak with the Olivier's arrival.

Antony and Cleopatra-Ziegfeld 12/20/51. "Even better" is how the daily reviewers felt about the Shakespeare production in the Olivier's scheme, with the plays to be presented on alternate nights. This time Olivier as the romantic Antony was the star of the evening. Leigh was deemed perfect and beautiful as the wise Queen, with Helpmann as Octavius Caesar sharing the top laurels. Atkinson, Times, is sure there has not been as fine a production of the play in 25 years, or as fine a Shakespearean production in even longer. Once again the deceivingly simple turntables by Furse, the incidental music, the perfect direction and group acting was heralded. But this time the sole negative vote came from McClain, Journal American, who had two objections. First many lines could not be heard in his 5th row seat and second the entire company postured and talked in a trite Shakespeare style that was annoying. Though Watts, Post, noted that both productions had improved since he saw them this summer in England, he thought the recent Katharine Cornell-Godfrey Tearle production was more satisfactory. Hawkins, WT&S, also praised current production as stimulating entertainment, but commented that in both plays the words ended up second best to music, color and action. Dash, Women's wear, found Shakespeare production more enthralling than the Shaw.

! Late Drama News !

NYC Mayor Impellitteri named Christmas week "Actors' Fund Week" and okayed theatre collections for that week in Broadway playhouses... Emlyn Williams' will bring his Dickens' readings to Golden Feb 4... 10% of "Cleopatra" tickets are still for sale, with ads listing dates... Bartlett Robinson subbed for Henry Fonda in Point of No Return for several performances, Fonda was out due to laryngitis... 10th edition of "Stubs", the listing of theatre seat plans, on sale... Memorial tribute to J. Edward Bromberg held at Hotel Diplomat.

